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Social Media and Political Participation: A case study of Sunyani Municipal

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Summary:

This study examined the factors that enable or disable citizens to use social media for political participation. The main focus was residents of Sunyani municipal, Ghana. The research questions that guided the study sought for the main forms of social media used by the citizens, the activities the citizens perform on social media, reasons why the citizens use social media for political activities and what prevented them from using social media for political participation.

The study was anchored on the theory of deliberative democracy which explains interactions and discussions promotes political participation. Also, the concepts of social media and political participation were used to support the study. Quantitative analysis was used in analyzing the 279 responses obtained from the respondents.

The results unveiled that social media use for political activities has gained root among the citizens in Sunyani municipal. Prominent among these factors in promoting social media use for political activities among the citizens is cost effectiveness, wider coverage and less time consuming.

The study established that with the adoption of social media into the political arena, information sharing has greatly been improved, allowing citizens to discuss political and social issues. The study concludes that social media has played and will continue to play a very important role in enhancing citizen's political participation.

Keywords: social media, political participation, democracy, deliberative, discussion, citizen

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Indisputably, social media in recent times has had impact on political participation. Abubakar (2011, p. 103) observed that social media is in the past few years altering political participation as it offers an online platform which serves as a political capital that provides people with the opportunity to participate in political activities. Political participation includes citizens' contribution to the activities that impacts on the selection and the activities of politicians. It can be seen as the channel or medium through which public opinions are expressed (Chatora 2012, p. 4). Political participation involves much more than just voting, and it encompasses freedom of speech, attending protest and marches, opportunity to campaign and demonstrate. It is also an avenue for citizens to communicate their interests, preferences and need to governments by engaging in discussions and public debate.

Holt, Shehata, Strmbäck, and Ljungberg (2013) and Rojas and Puig-i-Abril (2009) are of the view that political participation has a dominant influence on the actions of governments either through direct or indirect means. Directly, political participation can shape or change government policies, and at the same time the selection of individuals who make policies can be affected indirectly by political participation.

Political participation activities have in recent times been augmented by the introduction of social media. Social media has undoubtedly gained a wider acceptance and usage around the world and it can be said to be one of the significant medium for communication in recent times (Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009). The media has gained wide patronage worldwide, and it presents a digital platform based on the concept of sharing and discussing information among the online users of the social community. It is an interactive web-based media platform that offers citizens the opportunity and place to connect, share opinions, experiences, views and knowledge. They are part of modern forms of media that centres on social networking which allows users to express themselves, interact and share information

with much flexibility as well as share their views on issues via the World-Wide Web (Chun, Shulman, Sandoval, & Hovy, 2010).

According to Abubakar (2011, p. 103), social media has become the main source of personal orientation, communication and interaction on a number of issues that involve politics. The rapid use of social media among citizens and civil society organizations offers the possibility of strengthening citizens' voice in politics, promoting political activism and government accountability through interaction. Interaction is an important feature of social media which enables people to distribute content, connect with other users, broadcast content from other people, and react to other messages via various functions associated with the applications (Guerrero-Solé, 2018, p.2). The interactive functions associated with the various social media applications serves as an important tool in determining users' interactive behaviour especially when it comes to political deliberations. For instance, retweeting or sharing of a political post are seen as endorsements from people (Guerrero-Solé, 2018, p.2). Interactions involve "conversational exchange" by parties who have the same interest. Interactions are thus a didactic communication among people who discuss and share opinions on issues that interest them. Compared with the conventional forms of media such as the print media and television, social media provides features that enable interactions among participants. Though before the advent of social media political activities were aided by the traditional media, political deliberations were more of a one-way communication where people only have access to information but were denied the opportunity to share, like, comment or counter-comment on those messages (Ariel & Avidar, 2015).

Presently, social media applications like Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and WhatsApp has given the push to promote citizen participation in various political activities. Social media has the capacity of enhancing political participation because of the minimum cost associated with its use and the attractive interactive features it provides to engage users (Chatora, 2011, p. 4). This has made most politicians, advocacy groups, interest groups as well as citizens around the world to have all resorted to the use of social media for political activities. In 2011, former Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan, announced his intentions to contest for the presidential elections through Facebook to his "217 000-plus fans" and "over half a million

followers” (Chatora, 2011, p.5). Also, in 2011, Zambia’s civil society, “Bantu Watch”, used Facebook and Twitter to monitor the elections by simply encouraging the citizens to report any incidence related to the elections on their social media page (Chatora, 2011, p. 5). Again, social media has been used in recent times for organizing political and mass protests such as the Arab Spring in Egypt and Libya (Chatora, 2012, p. 5).

It is worth mentioning that in Ghana, many politicians have adopted social media as an alternate means to keep in touch with the electorates, especially the young population (Dzisah, 2018, p.33). Major political parties like the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC) have adopted social media as a way of engaging with their supporters in order to develop their political consciousness. A video posted on Facebook by the NDC presidential candidate prior to the 2016 elections was viewed and shared 155, 000 and 1127 times respectively (Dzisah, 2018, p.34). Also, the same candidate had the message #transformingGhana and #Changinglives with various pictures of infrastructure to show his achievements trending on social media (Dzisah, 2018, p.35). The 2016 presidential campaign in Ghana saw various presidential aspirants interacting with the populace on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Adam, 2016). The leader of the Progressive People’s Party (PPP) had over 260, 000 Facebook and 50, 000 Twitter followers to interact with (Adam, 2016). The use of social media prior to the 2016 presidential elections enabled both the electorates and the party candidates to interact and express and their views on various political issues which were of interest to them. The effective use of social media at that time implies that the electorates as well as the politicians accept the use of social media “as a complementary and effective communication tool as well as a source of political information” (Dzisah, 2018, p.34).

Social media in Ghana does not only serve as a deliberative platform where voters and politicians seek, share or interact with each other on issues of interest, but also as a medium where other political activities take precedence from (Acquaye, 2015). Over the years, social media have been used to mobilize and organize people for political activities such as demonstrations and protest against government policies or incompetent governments. In 2015, some celebrities in Ghana mobilized an appreciable number of Ghanaians through

social media for a peaceful demonstration against the inconsistency power supply at that time (Acquaye, 2015).

1.2 Problem statement

The use of social media for political discourse continues to grow especially in this era when some influential world political leaders resort to applications like twitter and Facebook in their communication and campaign.

Regardless of this, social media has also become platforms for political abuse and the instigation of violence which impacts negatively on the peace and stability of nations. According to Okoro and Nwafor (2013, p.31), social media played a major role in encouraging violence that occurs prior and after Nigeria's 2011 general election. They argued that during election period, a lot of misinformation circulates on social media and this contributes to unnecessary tensions. Apart from misinformation, Okoro and Nwafor (2013, p.32) write that supporters of various parties also engage in social media war through abusive language use and attacks which instigates violence.

Nonetheless, all this participation on social media provides citizens with political opportunities which help them to manipulate their political systems to their own advantage (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012, p.320). Despite social media being seen as a great coordinating tool for most political activities, there are still some challenges with its utilization. In some parts of the world, authoritarian governments try to curtail the use of such tools by limiting accessibility to certain social media tools. For instance, in China, no social media service is available to the people in Shanghai and Beijing because of access restrictions imposed by the government (Mainka, Hartmann, Stock & Peters, 2014, p.1722).

Social media for political participation in Ghana is limited. In Ghana, though politicians in recent times are making frantic efforts to promote their political ideas via social media, most

people access social media sites for social interactions and connections, and political participation activities such as attending rallies tend to get much patronage as compared with social media. Social media relevance and its effective use in the realm of political participation thus remain mostly untapped, and adequate studies that focus on citizen's social media use for politics is limited. Hence this study is premised on adding to the available literature by assessing social media and political participation. The findings would result in unearthing the challenges to the use of social media for political participation and ways of addressing these challenges to augment citizens' effective use of social media for politics. Subsequently, citizens would be abreast in the effective ways of using social media so that they could reap its benefit and enhance political participation.

1.3 Justification of the study

The widespread of Social Networking Sites (SNS) have made it one of the most used internet service worldwide (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012, p.319). Jung et al (2012, p.319) assert that social media usage for information promotes democratic activities. Social media have served as a useful tool in enhancing the well-being of citizens in many countries. For instance, in 2008 about 20,000 Canadians used Facebook to register their grievances concerning the delay in introducing the "copyright reform bill", and in the year 2006, numerous American students used their Myspace account to organize marches on immigration issues which was affecting them (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung, & Valenzuela, 2012, p.319 – 320).

Social media regardless of it enhancing political participation remains somehow underutilized among many people especially in Ghana. This study embodies findings and valuable information that will aid the public and politicians as well to utilize social media in electoral processes and electoral systems. Citizens would be abreast on the challenges to using social media as well as effective ways of using social media so that they could reap its benefit of enhancing political participation.

Again, the benefit from the study in terms of knowledge with regard to politics, the web and social media would be broadened. The exploration of social media and how it functions together with politics would help the readers garner the needed skill and knowledge.

In addition, it will augment the stock of knowledge on social media networks and its relevance in politics and form the basis for interested researchers, scholars and social media network website practitioners to research on.

1.4 Objectives and research questions

This paper focuses on studying social media and political participation in Ghana. There are various studies on social media with some focusing on social media and well-being; social media in teaching and learning (Burke, Marlow & Lento, 2010; Moran, Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2011) among others. However, this study will concentrate on the challenges and advantages to using social media for political participation.

Research questions

The study shall be guided by the following research questions

1. What are the main forms of social media used by the citizens of Sunyani Municipal, Ghana?
2. What activities do citizens perform on social media?
3. Why do citizens choose social media for political participation?
4. What prevent citizens from using social media for political participation?

1.5 Methodology and organization of the study

The study adopts both theoretical and empirical perspective in order to explore this issue. This study will adopt the survey research design to gather data and compare related features (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.206). The survey is a good way of using the same question items for different respondents (Bergstrom, 2006, p.17). Primary source of data will be used for the study. Primary source of data was obtained from the field by the use of online questionnaires. The target population were the people who live in the Sunyani Municipality in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana.

This study is analysed based on quantitative methods. Quantitative instruments like descriptive statistics are adopted to show the relationship or correlation between the major variables.

This research is organised into five chapters. Chapter one consists of the introductory chapter. Chapter two focus on the democratic theories, precisely deliberative democracy which the study is based on and the conceptual framework relevant to the study as well as the literature review. Chapter three addresses the methodology of the study. It includes the research design, source of data, target population, sampling methods and techniques, research instrumentation, and data analysis plan. Chapter four encompasses the presentation of findings, analysis and interpretation of results. Chapter five draws possible conclusions on the basis of the findings, and an indication of their relevance or policy making implications. Recommendations are also made in this chapter.

2 THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Deliberative democracy

Democracy can be simply said to be the rule by the people. The term democracy emerged around the 5th century BC and it comes from the Greek word “demokratia” which stands for demos (people) and kratos (rule) (Dahl, 2019, p.1). Democracy according to Schmitter and Karl (1991, p.114) “is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens”. The system of government determines access to public policies and what goes into the making of those policies. The public realm includes the making of communal rules or choices that the society adheres to. Similar to other forms of government such as dictatorship and autocracy, democracy also depends on rulers and the ruled. Democracy is different from nondemocratic forms of government in a sense that there are rules that determine how authorities come to power as well as rules that make them accountable. Schmitter and Karl (1991, p.115) write that in a democracy, the most unique part is its citizens. In the past citizens experienced a great number of restrictions which prevented them from joining political associations or taking part in other political activities among others (Schmitter & Karl 1991, p.115). After many struggles, today most democratic practices are fairly standard.

Most people equate democracy with elections, that is, people think the practice of democracy is when elections take place and people are declared legitimate winners. For Schmitter and Karl (1991, p.115) this is just “electoralism” since democracy is not just about election which occurs intermittently. There are countless political activities that take place before and after elections. There are several actions citizens embark on in order to influence policies using various means such as social movements or the internet. Democracy today “offers a variety of competitive processes and channels for the expression of interest and values” (Schmitter & Karl, 1991, p.116). Democracy enables cooperation. That is citizens can freely come together or act collectively via movements or internet platforms in order to make their preferences known and influence the actions of governments. Democracy should encourage citizens to discuss issues of interest among themselves and to find their basic needs.

Democracy as a concept has various theories that give different meanings to the forms or types of democratic theories. Among some of the democratic theories include liberal democracy, participatory democracy and deliberative democracy (Cunningham, 2002). Liberal democracy can be said to be the acknowledgment of people's rights and freedom. Participant democracy considers active citizen engagement in political activities (Cunningham, 2002, p.123). Deliberative democracy rests on the ideals of public argument and reasoning between citizens. Deliberative democratic theory unlike the other theories focuses on giving citizens access to well inform political issues which enables participation (Nabatchi, 2010, p.17). This paper will adopt the deliberative democratic theory because social media enables deliberations, and provides an avenue where citizens can engage in discussions to make their preferences known and make decisions as well.

Deliberative democracy is more successful in including the voice of people in various policies through interactions. Deliberation is a procedure which involves learning, considering and talking about issues. People who engage in deliberations look for information and present their views on them. An eminent deliberative democrat, Seyla Benhabib suggest that deliberative democracy is what democratic institutions should practice (Cunningham, 2002, p.163). Some of the prominent proposers of deliberative democracy or deliberative democratic theorist include John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. Rawls pushed for the utilization of reasoning which for him can enable citizen participation. Habermas, who is seen as the philosophical father of deliberative democracy, asserts that people will only accept decisions if they are able to freely and equally participate in discussions leading to the formation of those decisions (Cunningham, 2002, p.163).

Deliberative democratic theory proposes means by which democracy can be enhanced through deliberations. The deliberative theory of democracy is anchored in discussions (Chambers, 2003, p. 308). According to Chambers (2003, p.308), it is more of a "Talk-centric democratic theory". Thus, deliberative democracy centres on interactions, and it is about decision making by all who will be affected by it. Thus, it focuses on the communication of views which it affords participation by various people (Chambers, 2003, p. 308; Nabatchi, 2010, p.18). According to Nabatchi (2010, p.18), if deliberative processes are organized well,

then the problems that prevent participation can be overcome. According to Wright and Street (2007, p.850), deliberative democracy concerns informed discussions among people on matters that concern them. Deliberative democracy according to Wright and Street (2007, p.851) is of twofold: “the deliberative element and the democratic element”. The deliberative part is of the view that argumentation is the best way to decision making whereas the democratic component implies that people who will be impacted by a decision should in one way or the other have the chance to deliberate on the issue. According to Cunningham (2002, p.164) political processes should allow “reasoned deliberation” over issues of interest.

Deliberative democracy is significant in a sense that it offers citizens the opportunity to talk about their preferences. Discourse according to Hill and Hughes (as cited in Wright and Street 2007, p.851) is the backbone for participation as far as democracy and politics are concerned. Deliberative democracy is all about ongoing talks or interactions which concentrates on people’s interest. Plainly, deliberative democracy advance means by which political participation takes place through open discussion about issues. Reasons must be openly given and discussed in suitable forums where participants can have easy access. As citizens, each and every one should have means to have their say about political decisions. There are numerous ways of doing this, for instance writing letters to parliamentarians or for publication in newspapers and protesting among others. Online discussion forums such as social media are tools that have the potential of making deliberations possible for, if not all, most of the people in our societies.

Social media have the kind of space which enables deliberation as far as political participation is concerned. The special features of the web as well as its possibility to aid asynchronous interactions have established a virtual world which enables political participation. Deliberative democracy is key to effective political participation in democratic societies, but some writers assume the possibility of online discussion forums to aid high large-scale discussions on political issues is not practical (Wright and Street, 2007, p.850). However, internet applications like social media provides a solution to such issues since it aids political deliberations. Wright and Street (2007, p.850) posit that it is not conceivable to infer that online discussion forums hinder discussions but rather they make it possible and as such those

assumptions are false. Online discussions give people access to information or policies that concerns them. People comment, post, share or like on the information to make their preferences known. This enables people to participate in political activities since online platforms enable “deliberation (citizen to citizen communication) and ‘hearing’ (citizen to authority communication) (Wright and Street, 2007, p.851). Online forum promotes political participation by creating a “conversational democracy” that enables interaction between citizens and political authorities. Online forums enable people to participate in political activities even from the comfort of their bedrooms. It is less costly and requires a little time of its users. Wright and Street (2007, p.852) write that online forums allow people to go about their normal duties while participating in political discussions that are of interest to them.

Online deliberations on political issues are made possible by the availability of some resources. That is, there are certain resources which enable or disable citizens to participate in any political activity. Teorell (2006, p.798) and Bergström (2006, p.14) name these resources as physical capital, human capital and social capital.

Physical capital covers every single material resource that an individual have in his or her possession (Bergström, 2006, p.14). These resources include a person’s income, wealth and personal properties among other private assets. Time is another physical asset since the amount of time a person has at his or her disposal becomes an advantage to the person in terms of participation. Time can be utilized for political activities in a wide range of courses, for instance composing letters to the editor section or going to a community meeting. Moreover, access to information communication technology tools like mobile phones, televisions, fax machines and internet connection all constitutes material assets that enable participation.

Human capital as a resource refers to such capabilities that make or render an action possible (Bergström, 2006, p.14). Such capabilities include “education, [experience], knowledge and skills” (Teorell, 2006, p.799). Human capital gives individuals the ability to discover and exploit things for themselves (Unger, Rauch, Frese & Rosenbusch, 2011, p.2). Participation becomes

possible for individuals in the first place due to the knowledge they have about such activities. Human capital can be seen as a significant resource as far as participation is concerned since education, knowledge or skills are key in helping people to acquiring other assets like income to enable them engage in participation. Also, skills such as speaking and writing well will make participation effective for an individual.

Social capital on the other hand refers to social resources in general. It is characterized by social networks and relations among individuals. According to Teorell (2006, p.799) social capital “consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure”. Social structures like social media for instance enable participants who are on such platforms to communicate with or take certain actions like organising of demonstrations as a way to influence politics. Social capital is inherently concerned with social relations and networks, and this has the potential to increase participation or offer an avenue to people to engage in political activities. The fundamental thought is straightforward: access to informal communities expands the likelihood of an individual to be enlisted to political activities (Bergström, 2006, p.14). Interpersonal networks structures the stream of information that surrounds individuals, and because large systems associate individuals, the entrance to such systems expands the likelihood of taking a political interest.

Besides physical, human and social capital, incentives are also an important factor that triggers people to participate in political activities. That is most people engage in participation with the hope of deriving a certain benefit. Bergström (2006, p.14) writes that: “rational people cannot be expected to participate in activities where the purpose is people’s common good”. This is to say individuals place enthusiasm on collective efforts so that they can get some benefits which are advantages (material) for participating. Incentives are not only in material form, but there are other non-material incentives that fuel participation. One such incentive is what Teorell (2006, p.800) calls “process incentives”. According to him, people tend to participate out of mere excitement irrespective of whatever is at stake. Another form of incentive is the “expressive incentive” where people participate as a way of showing their support or reaffirming their identity. This form of expressive incentive is much seen even

among members of a family, groups or tribes who associate themselves with some type of political movement.

2.2 Social media

Social media extensively refers to internet-based applications or tools and services that enable users to connect with one another, produce content, disseminate and get access to online information. Social media tools are social because of their synergistic nature. Social media are part of the web 2.0 tools which encourage users to produce, collaborate and share content online.

According to Safko and Brake (2009, p.6): “social media refers to activities, practices, and behaviours among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media”. Conversational media are online tools that conceivably enable users to make and effectively transmit content as text, images, videos, and sounds. This definition tends to focus on the activities among members of a social community who come together to make their opinions known.

There are as yet numerous continual discussions and exchanges with respect to social media's universal definition. Notwithstanding what the institutionalized definition in essence would be, huge numbers of current studies and articles have expressed the basic reason for social media. Dann and Dann (2011, p.344) write that social media is about interconnection between clients and correspondence technologies. It tends to be engaged around a particular site (e.g.: Facebook), online administration (e.g.: Twitter) or the more extensive Internet as a whole. Dann and Dann (2011, p.345) go on to further elaborate that social media is portrayed by three integral and interconnected components namely “communications media, content and social interaction”. Communication media is the framework that permits interactions socially and enables the existence of continuous content and to have an equivalent virtual space. Content also includes photos, music, news, videos and other shared things of value

that draw individuals to social media sites. Social interactions on the other hand involve the interconnections of users with other users through specific applications or tools. All these three components must exist for social media to be effective.

For Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p.61) in order for one to make sense of what social media is, then the terms Web 2.0 and User Generated Content (UGC) must be understood first. Web 2.0 refers to a platform where content and applications are persistently changed by all users in a participatory and synergistic manner. UGC refers to all the ways and means by which people utilize social media. To be more specific, it refers to the different types of freely accessible media content produced by end-users. So for Kaplan and Haenlein, social media as an internet application is based on Web 2.0 which enables users to create and exchange user generated content. Clearly speaking, social media and web 2.0 are not two independent things; social media and web 2.0 come together to enable communities to exchange user generated contents.

In the present stage, Web 2.0, and social media applications encourage a social network which empowers users to create, communicate and share content on the web (internet). This development has facilitated the creation of various social media platforms that enables individuals to participate in online activities. Some of these platforms include podcast, weblogs, wikis and microblogs among others. Chatora (2012, p.2) writes that social media consist of six different groups:

- Collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia)
- Blogs and microblogs (e.g. Twitter)
- Video content communities (e.g. YouTube)
- Social networking sites (e.g. Facebook)
- Virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft)
- Picture sharing sites (e.g. Flickr)

Over the years, most Africans have in one way or the other engage with a number of these platforms. For instance, Facebook as a social networking site has been widely used as a communication tool throughout the continent with about 177,005,700 registered users as at December 31, 2017 (internetworldstats.com). The role played by social media (Facebook and Twitter) in the Jasmine Revolution of Tunisia as well as the Egyptian protest shows its significance in contributing to political participation.

As at December 2017, there were more than ten million (10, 110, 000) internet users in Ghana representing 34.3% of the population (internetworldstats.com). Most of these users are youth who keenly participates in political activities, and constitutes more than sixty percent of the countries' voters (Van Gyampo, 2017, p.192). Giving that, I think the power of social media for politics in Ghana must not be underestimated.

2.2.1 Types of social media

As mentioned already, social media falls under six categories, and each of this provide unique features and experiences to its users. For the purpose of this study only two categories – social networking site (Facebook) and microblogs (Twitter) – will be considered.

Social networking sites (SNS) are sites that permit users to create an open profile and connect with others who are able to access the profile so as to communicate. That is, a platform or an application where individuals are able to connect. SNS are web-based tools or applications or services that enable people to “(1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p.2). That is SNS enables individuals to create profiles, express themselves and associate with others. For individuals, SNS are outlets which present them with the opportunity of communicating and participating in other activities.

Analysing openly accessible content on SNS has become an undeniably famous technique for considering socio-political issues. Such open content is basically available as Wall posts and comments which offers individuals the chance to express their opinions on a given subject, news or issues. SNS, for example Facebook which will be considered for this study is clearly becoming essential in the political lives of its users. Facebook serve different functions including facilitating political discussions. Kushin and Kitchener (2009) write that Facebook play a role in encouraging participants' online political discussion.

Microblogs on the other hand are real-time information network which enables users to broadcast message (Suh, Hong, Pirolli & Chi, 2010, p.2. Microblogging enables users to disseminate short messages through texts, cell phones, or the Web. The most popular among these microblogs is Twitter which will be the focus of this study. Twitter allows users to broadcast up to 280 character in a single tweet (theverge.com). Twitter engages citizens when it comes to political processes, and according to Bekafigo and McBride (2013, p.627) twitter as well as other social media platforms expand political participation. A study by Amman (2010, p.13) revealed that most US senators use microblogs (Twitter) to communicate with their followers, and tweeting was substantively significant as far as voter turnout is concerned. Amman (2010, p.6) writes that one advantage to twitter use is its ability to mobilize people and discuss important information with them. Twitter as a platform provides access to both information and supporters. It helps politicians to know what people think about their policies and whether majority of the people support or reject such policies.

Microblogs are important tools when it comes to political participation since it disseminates information to individuals who become more engaged in their political activities.

2.3 Political participation

Political participation is a concept that emanates from the field of social and political science. There are numerous definitions to this concept, and broadly it includes such activities citizens engage in to manipulate government and politics as a whole (Chatora 2012, p.3). People's ability to vote, freedom to speak out, assemble and associate, participate in the conduct of public affairs, registering as candidates, campaigning for electoral office and holding political office at all levels of government are all forms of political participation (Chatora 2012, p.3).

Political participation comprises political, politics and participation. In his book "The Political Web", Peter Dahlgren (2013, p.18) writes that: "'The Political' refers to collective antagonisms, conflicts of interest that can emerge in all social relations and settings". This means that the political refers to all possible situations that can develop in every single social connection and setting. Broadly, politics on the other hand include the policies made by banks, trade unions and educational institutions (de Vries, 2007, p. 781). Bergström (2006, p.6) writes that politics include "the art or science of government [the process of controlling or impacting Governmental policies and] the art or science concerned with winning and holding control over a government". Politics also include individual as well as the views of the general public and the relationship that exist with individuals. Politics thus encompasses the various decisions which take place in formalized and non-formalized contexts, concerning citizens and the state, which aims at working towards the common good of all.

Participation on the other hand involves the decisions people make. Such decisions include voting to elect or remove leaders. Participation is a specific action taken by individuals who come together to do things collaboratively (Effing, Van Hillegersberg and Huibers, 2011, p. 29). Along these lines, perhaps participation means association with the political irrespective of the context at which it takes place.

Political participation can be said to be the wilful activities by which individuals of the society share in the choice of rulers and formation of policies (Bergström, 2006, p.4). Thus activities of political participation such as voting, attending rallies and taking part in discussions and protest among others are all voluntary activities that the public engage in at their own will. Though it may be argued that activities such as voting may be a requirement of the law but people choose to do it at their free will, and nonetheless not all political participation activities may be voluntary. Voting is considered by most people to be the significant activity as far as political participation is concerned. However, being a member of a political party or group, communicating or making contacts with politicians, seeking assistance from people in government, embarking on strikes or demonstrations, boycotts, riots, signing of petitions or being part of a political group chat on social media among other exhaustive activities all constitutes political participation.

In a simple approach, political participation is citizens' involvement in the acts, events or activities that influence the determination of or the moves made by political representatives. It refers to the different means by which the public express their political views or exercise their influence on the political process (Chatora, 2012, p. 3). According to Abubakar (2012, p.101), political participation is the inclusion of individuals in any political procedures prior to a collective decision being made. As such political participation involves citizens' commitment concerning socio-political issues.

From all the definitions of political participation above, it can be seen that political participation is mostly lawful activities which aim at influencing government personnel and policies. However, political participation is not limited only to lawful activities since there are always alternative means through or by which people try to influence politics. Lam gives an alternative meaning to political participation which I think will be very useful for this study. According to Lam (2003, p. 491), "Political participation refers to lawful or unlawful activities of support, making demands, debates, and other forms of expressions communicated verbally and/or through the media targeted at [...] governments. Acts of political participation also include political activities that are targeted at private institutions, such as university administrations and businesses, and that are designed to pose challenges to existing rules,

norms and practices”. Thus, the extent of political participation considers unlawful activities as well as acts of support focused on both government and certain private organizations. Political participation does not take place only in formalised institutions but it takes place also in the public and various social domains such as the media.

It is worth noting that political activities take various forms, and citizen’s participation in politics is heterogeneous. Political participation is expensive and requires a great number of resources from people willing to engage in such activities. As noted by Chatora (2012, p.4): “[political participation] is quite taxing as far as time, money, knowledge and information are concerned”. All these factors hinder people from partaking in political activities especially in place where poverty levels are high. Recently, social media and other internet tools are quick changing the circumstance as various online platforms provide an avenue where individuals resort to and take part in political activities. Social media is now a fundamental tool that people connect and interact on various political and social issues. Social media encourages collaborative political activities, and it provides chance to associate directly and actively with political frameworks. Social media tools additionally have the possibility to enable diaspora communities to engage with political activities back home.

2.4 Social media and political participation

Prior to the advent of social media, the mass media was the means through which information concerning the world as well as knowledge on political and social issues was disseminated (Negrine, 2003, p.1). Political participation activities at the time when social media was not effective required a lot of time and financial investment from people willing to take that path. People willing to participate in political discussions did not get that access since mass media like television and others did not have those features. Likewise, poverty in many communities also kept people from taking an interest in political activities (Chatora, 2012, p.4).

Social media in recent times has become an effective tool for communication and engaging in various political activities. As of late, social media such as SNS and microblogs plays an important role in political participation around the globe. The possibilities of social media have all the earmarks of being most encouraging in political setting as they can be an empowering influence on more participation. Creighton (2005, p.7) characterizes participation as the procedure by which the concerns and needs of the public are assimilated into the decisions made by government. Participation centres on utilizing social media as a selective instrument to encourage interaction among representatives and the represented. In 2008, social media employed in the US presidential campaign by Barack Obama, and republican Ron Paul's ability to raise millions of dollars with social media have shown that the tool is vital as far as political participation is concerned (Wattal, Schuff, Mandviwalla & Williams, 2010, p.670). Social media possesses incredible potential in encouraging participation, and it offers its users the chance to interact within their political framework. Social media applications have the possibility of enabling citizens in the diaspora to get involve in political activities back home. Applications like Twitter and Facebook enable deliberations on issues which is widely accessible by all citizens whom such issues concern. The utilization of applications like Facebook and twitter in politics has significantly changed the organization of political activities as well as political discussions. Social media's dominance in politics has made authorities and people holding positions responsible and available to electorates.

What is more, the capacity to distribute content and communicate it to a large number of individuals quickly enables political activities to be organized in real time and at no expense. Murse (2019) writes that social media has changed politics in various ways which include:

- Direct contact with voters
- Campaigning without incurring cost
- Tailoring message towards audience
- Weighing public response to an issue
- Leveraging (the power of many)

Social media does not only allows direct communication but also enables interaction between electorates and their representatives. Social media applications like SNS (e.g.: Facebook) and microblogs (e.g.: Twitter) provide a platform where electorates can share their opinions and engage in discussions. SNS and microblogs have been found to help many people to acquire “political information, particularly information that couldn’t be found in the traditional media” (Muntean, 2015, p.19). These applications keep politicians and citizens in constant contact, and it enables citizens to add their voices to issues of national interest. That is social media gives electorates a friendly and easy avenue where they can engage in political activities.

The possibilities of social media have all the earmarks of being most encouraging in politics as they can be an empowerment for participation. For Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013, p.1279), participation is a procedure through or by which the concerns and needs of the people are assimilated into the decisions of government through social media which enables interaction (deliberations) between citizens and their representatives. According to Karpf (2009, p.67) social media promotes what he calls “Politics 2.0” which can be understood as taking advantage of the internet’s cheap transaction expenses, and the abundance of information toward the objective of building participatory and interactive political arenas. It is evident that social media could be effectively use to contact and interact with electorates to circulate vital information to them. Most people are inspired to political issues using social media as a tool for deliberations. The features of social media such as Facebook and twitter enable interaction among people and as such establishes the required conditions for deliberative democracy. These platforms enable citizens to engage in discussions which makes them politically active in a sense that access to information has the tendency of stimulating political participation.

2.5 Social media use for politics

A ton of countries as well as politicians have kept on toeing along the lines of utilizing social media for politics as far back as Barack Obama broke new ground in 2008 (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013, p.35). A lot of articles continue to stress on the significance of social media for political activities around the globe. Chatora (2012, p.10) writes that social media have afforded different people the chance to be politically engaged and active on various forums.

Social media have become significant resources for the mobilization of people engaging in discussions aimed at political activities (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011, p.1208). Social media have played a significant role in relation to political participation in the Middle East and Africa especially with the social media aided protest in Tunisia and Egypt, popularly referred to as the Arab spring (Chatora, 2012, p.10). Both revolutions saw the use of social media to organize and share information about the uprisings. In Tunisia, social media became the main source for information and deliberations among the people (Lotan, Graeff, Ananny, Gaffney and Pearce, 2011, p.1377). Boauzizi's self-immolation spread democratic conversations on social media where his story was told to motivate people (Howard, Duffy, Freelon, Hussain, Mari and Maziad, 2011, p.2). Howard et al (2011, p.2) write that some key demographic group in the Tunisian revolution employed social media as a tool in exposing President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's corrupt government and his wife's misuse of state property. The conversations online sparked major events that eventually led to the revolution in Tunisia. Like the Tunisian spring, social media served as a forum for information in Egypt, and it enabled people around the globe to be aware of what was happening at that time. That is conversations on social media played a key role in the protests that toppled the Egyptian and Tunisian governments during the Arab spring. Findings from Howard et al (2011, p.3) concludes that political deliberations on social media precede political participation.

A study conducted by Muntean (2015, p.77) focusing on the use of social media during the 2014 Romanian elections found out that social media use for political activities is very significant especially for participation, and the more people liked, shared or tweeted on

political issues the more they became active to participate. Momoc (2013, p.120) concluded that social media are valuable public relation application for mobilizing citizens to vote and attend protest, and Romanians acquire their political information from social media.

A report by Chatora (2012, p.6-7) indicates that the Twitter page “PresidencyZA” and the Facebook page “The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa” is the primary source of information on government initiatives, and a source of interaction between citizens and the presidency and ministries on political issues of interest in South Africa. The report also revealed how Kenyan citizens used social media for information to engage in political activities. “Mzalendo initiative” – a watchdog over Kenya’s parliament – utilize SNS and microblogs to track parliamentarians and provide information on their activities to Kenyan electorates for them to comment, question and deliberate on them (Chatora, 2012, p.7).

Abubakar’s study on “Political participation and discourse in social media during the 2011 [Nigerian] presidential electioneering” concluded that social media afford a number of people the opportunity to effectively participate and get involve in political talks by voicing out on issues posted on social media in a “pleasant, unpleasant or neutral manner” (Abubakar, 2012, p.18).

In Ghana, there have been if not many a number of considerable studies that have focused on social media and political participation. A study conducted by Dzisah (2018, p.43) concluded that social media serves as a mobilising medium and it has deepened political participation in Ghana as far as democracy is concerned. The study further elaborates that people who use social media in Ghana prefer its use because it is flexible, allows for greater freedom and participation in politics (Dzisah, 2018, p.44). Social media was crucial in Ghana’s 2012 presidential elections as supporters of the two main parties – New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Party (NDC) – endlessly campaigned on Facebook and Twitter even after the campaign period (Dzisah, 2018, p.33).

Another study about social media and political campaigning in Ghana concluded that social media has changed political participation by diversifying news sources, and its capability to allow for proper targeting and direct and cheap access to political information.

All these engagements with social media and political activities indicate the importance of these informative devices in encouraging people's political participation.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Quantitative research method

Quantitative research look at factors or variables that influence an outcome. For instance, what factors make people use social media for political participation? Creswell (2009, p.446) writes that quantitative research is a way to test for theories by examining the relationship among variables. Quantitative research depends on the standards of the common sciences and accordingly depends on the suppositions of an objectivist perspective on the social world. Quantitative research for the most part includes the accumulation and examination of information through statistical methods with the point of deciding reality. Abbott and McKinney (2013, p.35) write that surveys, experiments, field research and secondary sources are the four basic research designs that are widely used in obtaining data in quantitative research methods.

This study adopted the survey research method. Survey research offers a quantitative depiction of the patterns or opinions of the populace by looking at a portion of that populace (Creswell, 2009, p. 485). Surveys are usually used to collect quantifiable data from respondents to measure, examine, analyse and generalize the findings. The survey is a good way of using the same question items for different respondents (Bergstrom, 2006). Surveys involve cross-sectional and longitudinal studies by utilizing questionnaires or structured interviews to collect data. The study adopted the cross-sectional approach to survey since the data was collected at one point in time.

There are various advantages of using survey to gather data in a research. Typically, surveys are utilized in scanning a broader field of issues or populations so as to portray general features (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.206). Again, surveys are used in collecting standard data; that is, it enables the researcher to use the same instruments and questions

for every one of the respondents. Furthermore, it enables the researcher to gather data that can be statistically processed.

Nonetheless, surveys can also be disadvantageous as well. Respondents might not be interested in giving the required answers or they may only give socially desirable answers. Moreover, the language and the rationality of the questions must be significant to the respondents, and in this way, careful thought must be taken when using survey methods. Everything considered, the survey research method for gathering data remains one of the used ways in obtaining data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.205 – 207).

3.2 Population of the study

Population refers to a group of people or objects which a researcher tries to study. Population according to Diem (2002, p.412) is the total arrangement of subjects that we can study, and these include humans, objects, animals and plants. In this study, the group under consideration will be individuals and it will comprise all eligible registered voters in the Sunyani municipality. According to the 2010 population census conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service, they reported that Sunyani Municipality has a population of 123,224 with 61,610 being males and 61,614 being females, hence the proportions of males and females in the population are almost the same (Ghana Statistical service, 2014, p.16).

In Ghana, people are eligible to vote only from the age of 18. According to the report, at the time of the census in 2010 people between the ages of 9 – 34 years were 68,224. Considering the time frame within which the census took place, these people will now be in the age ranges of 18 years to 43 years, therefore that number will be the total population from which the sample will be taken from. From this population, 34,286 are females while 33,938 are also males.

3.3 Determining sample size

Sample according to Cohen et al (2007, p. 100) is a “smaller group or subset” of the total population from which data is collected to represent the whole population. Usually the need for sampling arises due to factors like time and cost which prevent researchers from obtaining data from the entire populace. The assumption to sampling is that a large sample gives greater representation and reliability (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.101). Nonetheless, a large sample does not guarantee maximum representation so does a smaller sample.

In determining the sample size for this study, two online sites recommended by the authors Creswell (2009, p.467) and Cohen et al (2007, p.103) for calculating sample size were used. These sites are surveymonkey.com and surveysystems.com. In calculating sample size, the population, the confidence level and the confidence interval (the margin of error) must be taken into consideration. With this study, the total population from which the sample will be drawn is 97527. A confidence level of 95 percent which is the standard one was used and a confidence interval of 5 percent was used. The confidence level tells how certain one can be. The 95 percent confidence level means I can be 95 percent sure that the sample represents the population and the survey results can be 95 percent trusted to reflect the views of the entire population. The confidence interval on the other hand is “the degree of variation or variation range [...] that one wishes to achieve” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.103). With the confidence interval of 5 percent, if for instance 60% of the respondents use Facebooks, then it could be as low as 55% or as high as 65% (± 5 percent).

In all, out of the total population of 68,224 a sample size of 383 was drawn from both of the sites. Hence, my sample size for this study will be 383.

3.4 Sampling techniques

Sampling techniques involves the various methods used in choosing a sample to represent the population. Researchers use sampling since they cannot collect data from every single individual from their population of interest.

A total of 383 respondents would be selected to answer the survey questionnaires. The study will adopt a non-probability sampling approach. Specifically, purposive and convenience sampling techniques will be used to administer the questionnaires. Purposive sampling will be used because the decisions concerning the people to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher, based upon a variety of criteria. Purposive sampling enables researchers to access people who possess knowledge about particular issues (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.115). Convenience sampling involves selecting people based on their proximity and willingness to serve as respondents.

3.5 Sources of data

Primary sources of data will be used for the study. Primary sources of data will be obtained from the field through the administration of online questionnaires. Secondary data will also be used; this constitutes the theoretical and conceptual basis of the research. The sources for the secondary data include published books, articles, reports, papers, newspapers and other sources that will be relevant to the study.

The target population from whom primary data will be collected will be the people who live in the Sunyani Municipality in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana, and whose age ranges from 18 – 43. In Ghana, people are only eligible to vote from the age of 18, and people within this category are mostly youths who are either at the tertiary level or have completed tertiary education. Most of these people have access to smartphones, computer or internet and the

probability for them to engage in political participation activities like posting, liking or sharing of thoughts on a platform (WhatsApp, Facebook) will be higher.

3.6 Respondents and data collection

3.6.1 Response rate

A total of three hundred and eighty-three (383) questionnaires were administered online to the respondents between the months of April, 2019 and May, 2019. Of all the three hundred and eighty-three (383) questionnaires received, 279 were deemed valid. This was because some of the respondent's age was either below or above the age range of the sample population. Also, some of the respondents said they did not use social media, and since this study was about social media and political participation, the researcher found it necessary to exclude those respondents. In all, 279 questionnaires representing 72.8% of the total number of questionnaires administered were used for the analysis.

3.6.2 Demographic characteristics of respondents

It was necessary to obtain information on the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. This was to establish some form of relationship with other variables of the study in order to draw relevant conclusions and possibly make generalizations from the study. According to Assimeng, (1999), the socio-demographic characteristics have a relationship with many other parts of human social interaction in the lives of people. Thus, socio-demographic variables define relationships with the character of respondents as evidenced in their responses. The following were the socio-demographic variables sought for in the study: gender, age, and educational attainment. These are further discussed below.

3.6.2.1 Gender of respondents

This section discusses the gender category of the respondents. The statistical presentation is illustrated in the table below.

Table 1. Gender of respondents.

	Frequency	Percent
Female	102	36.6
Male	138	49.5
Prefer not to say	39	14.0
Total	279	100.0

From table 1, 36.6% of the respondents were females while 49.5% of the respondents were males. Also, 14.0 of the respondents' gender is unknown since they preferred not to say it. The majority of the respondents are males.

Men can be seen to be the most active and dominant participants in politics as seen from table 1 above. Although according to the 2010 Ghana Statistical Report, female population in the Sunyani municipality is slightly higher than the male population, this finding will in no way affect this study since the major focus was not to observe the gender perceptions of the subject matter. Besides, social media influences all individuals irrespective of their gender.

3.6.2.2 Age range of respondents

The usage of social media cuts across a wide spectrum of demographic characteristics such as age, sex, cultural backgrounds and religious affiliations among others. This is as a result of the major role it plays as a medium of providing information and getting people to stay connected. This section discusses the age range of citizens in the Sunyani municipality who use social media to participate in politics. The statistical presentation is illustrated in table 2.

The research findings from table 2 below indicate that majority of the respondents who participate in politics through the use of social media were within the age range of 24 – 29 years whilst the least age among the respondents (citizens) who participate in politics via social media were in the age range of 41 – 43 years. Respondents between the ages of 18 – 23 years were the second highest category of respondents who participate in politics through. The findings indicate that most of the respondents who use social media for political purposes are mostly youth who are between the ages of 18 – 29 with adults from 41 and above being the least population who use social media for political purposes.

Table 2. Age range of respondents.

	Frequency	Percent
18 - 23 years	62	22.2
24 - 29 years	71	25.4
30 - 35 years	49	17.6
36 - 40 years	53	19.0
41 - 43 years	44	15.8
Total	279	100.0

3.6.2.3 Educational qualification of respondents

Table 3 below indicates that 25.4% of the respondents have a Bachelor's Degree, followed by 24.4% of the respondents with a Diploma. Respondents with no formal education are the least among the respondents with just 1.4%.

Table 3. Educational qualification of respondents.

	Frequency	Percent
No formal Education	4	1.4
Junior Secondary School (JSS)/ Junior High School (JHS)	13	4.7
Senior Secondary School (SSS)/ Senior High School (SHS)	56	20.1
Highest National Diploma (HND)/ Diploma	68	24.4
First/ Bachelor's Degree	71	25.4
Master's Degree	27	9.7
Other(s)	40	14.3
Total	279	100.0

From the table, almost all the respondents have had formal education. Majority of them possess educational qualifications which can enable them to read and write. In relation to social media use and its connection to political participation, it becomes very relevant in assessing the levels of formal education attained by the respondents. The efficient use of social media in itself requires some level of knowledge and skill hence the importance of assessing the educational qualification of the respondents.

Since majority of the respondents have had some level of formal education, it implies that most of them are able to read and make meaning out of political issues that are passed on social media platforms which in turn affects their mind sets and belief system on political issues or activities.

3.6.3 Questionnaire

The instruments used for gathering data for this study was a self-designed online questionnaire. The questionnaires consisted of a set of questions presented to the respondent for answers. Basically, it was a method through which respondents' views or thoughts among other things were elicited. The questionnaires enabled the researcher to use the same question items for all respondents. The questionnaire included the research questions. In creating the questionnaires, the guidelines proposed by Leedy and Omrod (2010, as cited by Muntean, 2015, p.40) was adhered to. According to them, questionnaire must be brief, simple and unambiguous and clear instructions must be provided so that the necessary information required will be obtained. Also, questions must be framed in such a way that it does not lead to desirable answers.

Nominal data (categories) as well as ordinal data (ranking) were used in framing the question types. The question types used in the questionnaire are dichotomous questions, multiple choice questions and rating scale questions. Dichotomous and multiple choice questions include close-ended questions from which participants can choose from (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.322-323). Close-ended questions are "direct to the point", useful in quantitative research and it allows for comparisons (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007,

p.321). Rating scale questions on the other hand enables the researcher to ascertain the degree or intensity of the response to a question from different respondents (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.325). There are various scales like the Thurstone scale and Guttman scaling used in measuring rating scale questions, but with this study the Likert scale of Rensis Likert will be adopted and used (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.326). Apart from these question types, open-ended questions were also be used in the questionnaire to solicit information. This will prevent assumptions that all possible answers are known and have been included. It will enable participants to provide answers they want.

The questionnaire comprised four categories of questions. The first questions addressed socio-demographic variables: gender, age and education. The next questions were concerned with “the types of social media applications the respondents use, and what they use it for”. The other two questions referred to “the reasons why respondents choose to use social media for political participation” and “what prevented them from using social media for political participation?” (See Appendix for the questionnaire).

Also, taking into consideration that an online questionnaire was used, there was the need to look at some of its merits as well as its demerits. First of all, an online questionnaire is cheap when compared with the mailed or printed questionnaire. Also, questions in an online survey can be created as mandatory so that a respondent answer all the questions before he or she is able to submit it (Muntean, 2015, p.41). In order to get respondents for the questionnaire, the researcher will make the link to the questionnaire available to the students of Sunyani Technical University, a university in the municipality via their ICT laboratory and the electronic resources laboratory in the library. Apart from this, there are various internet café centres and result checking as well as school placement centres where people within the municipality visit every day. I will make the link available to these centres where people can access and answer the questionnaires. Finally, I will provide the link to people for them to answer based on their willingness to answer the questionnaires.

3.7 Data analysis

Data analysis comes after the data has been gathered from the field to comprehend the study. Data analysis is making the sense of the data obtained from the respondents (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.461). It involves interpreting and making meaning of it. It is difficult or impossible to explain raw data, one must first describe and analyse the data and then interpret the results of the analysis. Analysis of data is a means of categorization, ordering, manipulating and summarizing data to obtain answers to research questions.

The purpose of analysis is to decrease data to an understandable and interpretable form with the goal of studying, testing and drawing conclusions on the research problems. Interpretation takes the outcomes for analysis, makes derivations appropriate to the exploration relations considered and reaches inferences about these relations. For this study, descriptive statistics such as frequency tables and percentages will be used to analyse data collected from the field.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations can be said to be the norms of conduct that differentiates between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. They refer to doing what is morally and legally right when conducting a research. According to Cohen et al (2007, p.317) researchers cannot force respondents to answer questions and as such respondents must be encouraged in doing so.

Therefore, the researcher will seek permission to conduct the study, and they will be informed about the nature and purpose of the study for them to decide whether they are interested to take part or not. Also, a researcher has a moral obligation to protect sensitive information and uphold it from the public (Cohen et al, 2007, p.317). It is against this background that respondents will also be assured of high levels of confidentiality. In addition, respondents will be informed that the information gathered will solely be used for academic purposes.

3.9 Profile of study area

Sunyani Municipality (See Figure 1) is among the twenty-seven districts within the Brong Ahafo Region. It shares boundaries with Sunyani West District to the North, Dormaa East District to the West, Asutifi District to the South and Tano North District to the East (Ghana Statistical service, 2014, p.61). There is a diverse ethnic background in the Municipality but the Akan ethnic group is overwhelmingly the majority. Other tribes include Northerners, Ewes as well as the Ga-Dangme. There are various religions like Christianity, Islam and Traditionalist with the Christians being the dominant religion. In spite of the decent variety in ethnicity and religious alliance, residents in the region live in harmony and congruity.

According to the report on the 2010 Population and Housing Census, the Municipality has a population of 123,224 which represents 5.3 percent of the population in the region. Out of this number, 49.9 percent and 50.1 percent are males and females respectively (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014, p.12). More than eighty percent of the population is urban (83.1). The three largest localities namely Sunyani, Abesim, and New Dormaa have the largest population in the Municipality. According to the Ghana Statistical Service report (2014, p.13), 85.9 percent (81,118) are literate while 14.1 percent (13,417) are illiterates. Also, out every ten people, seven of them are able to read and write both English and Ghanaian languages.

The economy of the municipality used to be mostly agrarian. In any case, the rise of industrial and commercial undertakings has diversify the economy. At present the majority of the population are employed in the service sector. The Municipality can flaunt various institutions of higher studies, financial organizations, health amenities and numerous others. When it comes to information communication technology, about 66.0 percent of the population have mobile phones with men constituting about 69.5 percent and women being 62.5 percent (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014, p.64). The municipality has over 40 private internet facility centres and all the services from all the communication service providers in Ghana are available. This implies that access to ICT tools and internet in the municipality is high and as

such all things being equal the use of internet applications like social media will be high as well.

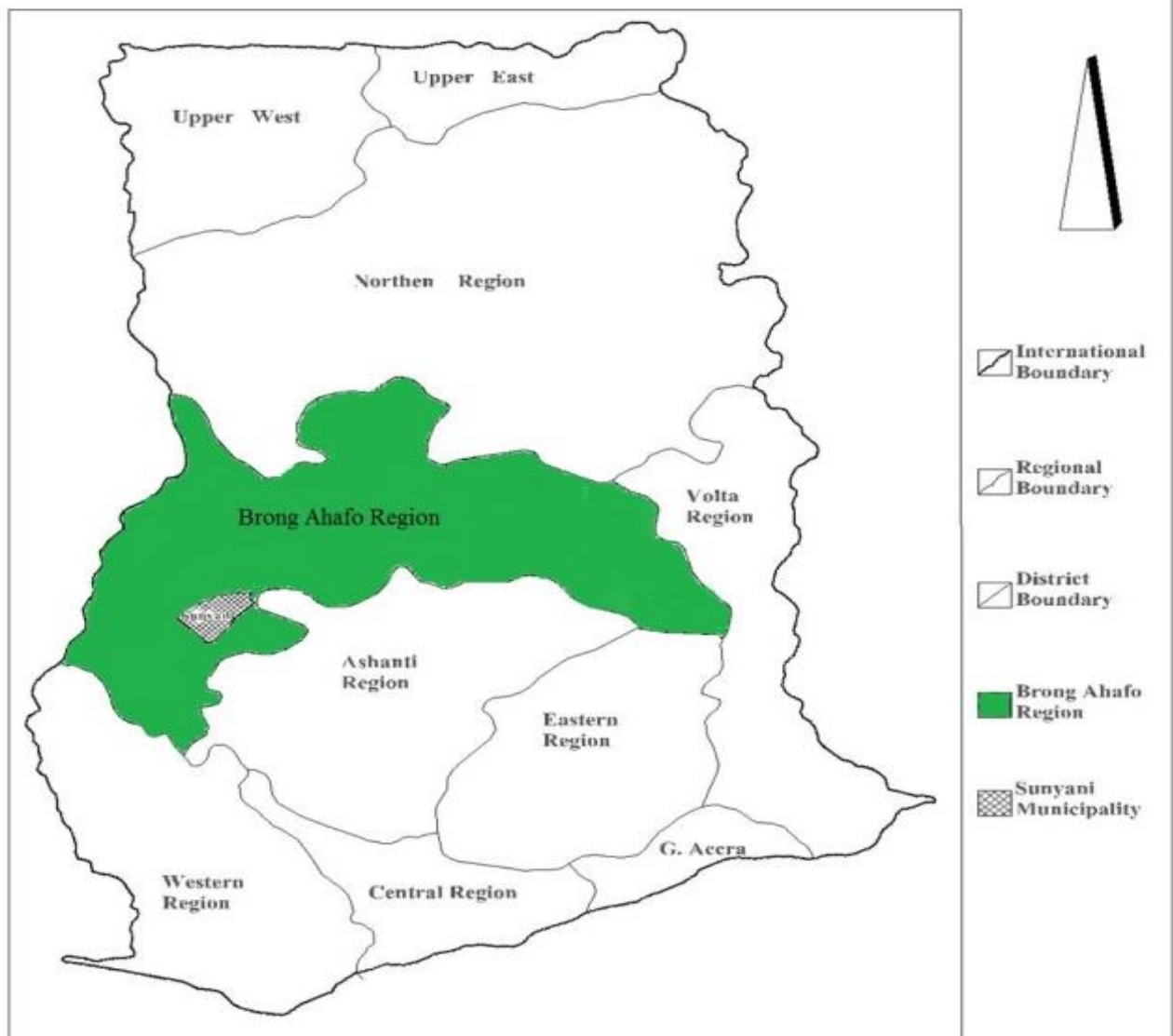


Figure 1. A map of Sunyani Municipality.

Source: www.google.com

4 FINDINGS

The findings of the study were based on four main objectives of the study. Specifically, this chapter covers findings on the research questions, thus

1. What are the main forms of social media used by the citizens of Sunyani Municipal?
2. What are some of the activities citizen's perform on social media?
3. Why do citizens choose social media for political participation?
4. What prevent citizens from using social media for political participation?

The results is presented with tables by the use of descriptive statistic such as frequency and percentages among others to analyze the data.

4.1 Forms of social media used by the citizens of Sunyani Municipal?

This section sought to ascertain the types of social media used in the Sunyani Municipality and what the residents use it for. In other to answer this, variables such as types of social media used, the frequency of usage, whether respondents were affiliated to groups on social media for political purposes, whether respondents were affiliated to a particular social media group because of their political affiliation, how often respondents used social media to participate in political activities. The statistical representations are illustrated in tables.

4.1.1 Types of social media used

It was relevant to determine the types of social media networks used in the Sunyani Municipality for political purposes. WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube were noted to be the various social media platforms used by respondents to participate in politics. The statistical representation is illustrated in table 4 below.

Table 4. Types of social media the respondents use.

	Frequency	Percent
WhatsApp	229	82.1
Viber	56	20.1
Facebook	197	70.6
Twitter	146	52.3
YouTube	120	43.0
Instagram	101	36.2

It is evident from the above data that, Facebook and WhatsApp are the most popular forms of social media platforms that respondents actively use. After Facebook and WhatsApp, Twitter is the third most used social media by respondents with a patronage of 52.3% followed by YouTube, Instagram and Viber.

Social media has promoted citizen participation in various democratic activities. This finding implies that citizens within the Sunyani Municipality are able to receive political information more easily since Facebook and Twitter provides an avenue for the dissemination of information.

Facebook and Twitter have a wider reach compared with WhatsApp which is only limited to the contacts of the user. These create a larger platform for the user as more information is provided from sources beyond the social circles of the user. Politicians are able to create fan based pages on Facebook and Twitter where they interact with the masses and appeal to them, which give them the advantage of keeping in constant contact with their supporters. Facebook and Twitter again give users a closer access to these political representatives and their policies hence its popularity and dominance as the most used social media platform in

political participation. Wall posts and tweets on Facebook and Twitter gives people the opportunity to express their opinions and sentiments on a given topic, news or issues.

4.1.2 Citizens affiliation to groups and participation in politics on social media

Joining a social media group or chat group is a great way to interact and share ideas. This section sought to find out from the respondents whether they are affiliated to groups that engage in politics on social media, and the frequency at which respondents use social media to participate in political activities.

According to the study as illustrated in the table below, 33.0% of the respondents use social media once a month for political participation whilst 22.2% have never used social media for political activities before. Again, 19.7% of the respondents use social media twice in every week for political activities, and 14.3% of the respondents use it every day as far as political participation is concerned. From the table, it can be concluded that most of the respondents use social media to participate in political activities since out of the 279 response received, only 22.2% of them said they have never used social media for politics which is far less as compared to the other respondents.

Table 5. Frequency at which respondents use social media for political activities.

	Frequency	Percent
Everyday	40	14.3
Once in a week	30	10.8
Twice in a week	55	19.7
Once in a month	92	33.0
Never	62	22.2
Total	279	100.0

The study also found out that 39.8% of the respondents are affiliated to a group on social media that engages in political activities while 60.2% also indicated that they are not affiliated to any political group on any of the social media platforms. Majority of the respondents indicated that they are not affiliated to group(s) on social media for political purposes. It can be seen that most of the respondents are affiliated to different groups either than political groups on social media.

It is worth mentioning that, although most of the respondents in table 6 above are not affiliated to political groups, this does not mean that they do not participate in political activities on social media. As presented in table 5 where only 22.2% of the respondents indicated that they never use social media to participate in politics, this implies that most of the respondents who are not affiliated to political groups engage in politics on social media from outside political groups.

Table 6. Respondents' affiliation to groups on social media for political activities.

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	111	39.8
No	168	60.2
Total	279	100.0

4.1.3 Cross tabulation of respondents' age range and how often they use social media

Table 7 below shows that respondents between the age range of 24 – 29 years and 18 – 23 years are the people who use social media a lot with a percentage of 25.45% and 22.22% respectively followed by respondents in the age range of 36 – 40 and 30 – 35. Of all the people who answered the questionnaire, those in the age group of 41 – 43 are the people who use social media the least with 15.77%. Also, from the table those in the age group of 41 – 43 years have the highest number of counts (22) for people who never use social media.

Table 7. Frequency at which different age range use social media.

	18 - 23 years	24 - 29 years	30 - 35 years	36 - 40 years	41 - 43 years	Total
Everyday	5	16	6	10	3	40
Once in a week	8	9	5	6	2	30
Twice in a week	18	14	11	7	5	55
Once in a month	22	25	16	17	12	92
Never	9	7	11	13	22	62
Total	62	71	49	53	44	279
Percent	22.22	25.45	17.56	19	15.77	100

4.2 Activities citizens perform on social media.

Politics has really evolved in recent decade with the advent of social media. In the political arena, social media has become an alternative way to participate in politics. People use social media for various reasons and this section sought to find out the activities respondents engage in on social media in terms of politics.

This study (as shown in table 8) revealed that 70.3% of the respondents use social media to read about political issues and 3.9% of the respondents use social media to stay up-to-date

on current political issues respectively. Another 8.2% of the respondents indicated that they use social media to share their opinions on political issues while 11.8% use social media to search for information on political figures with 5.7% saying they use social media for other things as far as politics is concerned.

It can be seen that, most of the respondents use social media to get themselves informed, update themselves on political issues and participate in political discussions. Through these interactions and discussions citizens become politically active.

Table 8. Activities respondents engage in on social media in terms of politics.

	Frequency	Percent
Read on political issues	196	70.3
To stay up-to-date on current political issues	11	3.9
To share my opinions on political issues	23	8.2
To search for information on political figures	33	11.8
Other(s)	16	5.7
Total	279	100.0

4.3 The use of social media for political participation.

Social media promotes citizen's participation in various political activities. There are various reasons that makes people to either use or not use social media for political activities. This section discusses the identified factors that influence citizen's participation in politics using social media.

Table 9. Why respondents participate in political discussions on social media.

	Frequency	Percent
Personal choice	84	30.1
To be politically active	176	63.1
Other(s)	19	6.8
Total	279	100.0

According to the respondents and as presented in table 9, 63.1% of them take part in political discussions on social media in order to be politically active. 30.1% of them claim it is a personal choice that makes them to participate in politics through social media, which can be assumed that they prefer to use social media for politics rather than using any other means. Also, 6.8% of the respondents claim it is due to other factors that is why they use social media for political discussions.

Table 10. Participation in politics through social media is cost effective.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	131	47.0
Agree	105	37.6
Disagree	18	6.5
Strongly disagree	25	9.0
Total	279	100.0

Table 10 above revealed that 47.0 % of the respondents strongly agree to the fact that the cost effective nature of social media influences them to participate in politics through it. Also, 37.6% of the respondents agree that using social media for politics is cost effective. From the 279 respondents, only 6.5% and 9.0% of them disagree and strongly disagree that social media use for politics is not cost effective. Hence, from the table it can be concluded that majority of the people think social media is cost effective as far as political participation is concerned.

From table 11 48.4 % of the respondents agree to the fact that social media facilitates or promotes political discussions. Also, 30.8% of the respondents strongly agree that social media facilitates or promotes political discussions. From the table it can be seen that the number and percentages of those who think social media does not promote political discussions is insignificant, hence most of the respondents agree that social media facilitates political discussions.

Table 11. Social media facilitates political discussions.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	86	30.8
Agree	135	48.4
Neither agree nor disagree	11	3.9
Disagree	25	9.0
Strongly disagree	22	7.9
Total	279	100.0

As illustrated in table 12, the study revealed that 58.1% of the respondents are of the view that social media is a source of political information whiles 29.4% also strongly agree that social media is a source of political information. Also, 1.8% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree that social media is a source of political information. From the table it can be seen that the number and percentages of the respondents who think social media is not a source of political information is insignificant, hence most of the respondents agree that social media is a source of political information.

Table 12. Social media is a source of political information.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	82	29.4
Agree	162	58.1
Neither agree nor disagree	5	1.8
Disagree	15	5.4
Strongly disagree	15	5.4
Total	279	100.0

Furthermore, in the study, it came to light that 36.6% of the respondents think that social media does not require much time in terms of political participation. Again, 26.2% also strongly agree that social media does not require much time when it comes to politics whiles 9.7% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree that social media does not require much time. Moreover, 14.7% of the respondents disagree that social media does not require much time and 12.9% strongly disagree that social media does not require much time when it comes to using it for political activities. However, it can be seen that the number and percentages of the respondents who think social media does not require much time is higher, and so it can be concluded that most of the respondents think social media does not take much of their time when it comes to sing it for political activities.

Table 13. Social media does not require much time.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	73	26.2
Agree	102	36.6
Neither agree nor disagree	27	9.7
Disagree	41	14.7
Strongly disagree	36	12.9
Total	279	100.0

This section sought to find out the reasons why citizens prefer to use social media for political participation. Four main variables, which are “cost effective”, “source of political information”, “facilitates political discussions” and “does not require much time” were used for this. Before asking the respondent’s opinions on the four main variables, they were first asked to tell why they participate in politics using social media. Of all the respondents, 63.1% claimed they want to be politically active, while 30.1% said it is a personal choice with 6.8% of them saying that they have other reasons why they use social media for politics.

The first variable was to find out if using social media for politics was cost effective. Among all the respondents, 84.6% of them had the view that social media is cost effective in terms of using it for political activities. It can be concluded that people will prefer to use social media for politics as compared to other means which may be expensive. This findings go in line with Karpf (2009, p.67) and Wright and Street’s (2007, p.852) claim that social media use has cheap transaction expenses and it is less costly.

With the variable which sought to ask the respondents if social media facilitates political discussions, 79.2% of the total respondents agreed that it facilitates political discussions. Again, when the respondents were asked if social media was a source of political information, 87.5% agreed to it. This supports Karpf's claim that social media is a source of abundance information which promotes participatory and interactive political environment (p.67).

Lastly, with the variable social media does not require much time, 62.8% of the respondents agreed to that.

4.4 What prevent citizens from using social media for political participation?

Political participation activities require a great number of resources from those willing to take that path. According to Chatora (2012, p.4), participation in politics requires time, money and knowledge among other things. This section discusses the factors or challenges that prevent people from using social media for political participation.

From the study, it became clear that 26.2% of the respondents disagree that social media use for political activities requires much time with 21.1% of them strongly disagreeing that social media use for political activities requires much time. Among the respondents, 24.0% of them agree that social media use for politics requires much time whiles 16.8% also strongly agree social media use for political activities requires much, and 11.8% neither agree nor disagree that social media use for political activities requires much time.

Table 14. Lack of time prevents me from using social media for political activities.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	47	16.8
Agree	67	24.0
Neither agree nor disagree	33	11.8
Disagree	73	26.2
Strongly disagree	59	21.1
Total	279	100.0

Table 15. Lack of accessibility prevents me from using social media for political activities.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	27	9.7
Agree	38	13.6
Neither agree nor disagree	20	7.2
Disagree	135	48.4
Strongly disagree	59	21.1
Total	279	100.0

Table 15 above sought to find out whether lack of access to resources like internet connection, mobile phones that support social media or computers were factors that hindered people from participating in politics using social media. 48.2% of the respondents disagree that lack of accessibility to internet, mobile phone and computers prevent them from using social media for political activities whiles 21.1% of them strongly disagree that lack of accessibility to internet, mobile phone and computers prevent them from using social media for political activities. However, 13.6% of the respondents agree that lack of accessibility to internet, mobile phones and computers prevent them from using social media for political activities, and at the same time, 9.7% of them strongly agree that lack of accessibility to internet, mobile phone and computers prevent them from using social media for political activities. Of all the respondents, 7.2 % of them are said that they neither agree nor disagree that lack of accessibility to internet, mobile phone and computers prevent them from using social media for political activities.

Table 16. Lack of knowledge prevents me from using social media for political activities.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	35	12.5
Agree	16	5.7
Neither agree nor disagree	11	3.9
Disagree	124	44.4
Strongly disagree	93	33.3
Total	279	100.0

From table 16, 44.4% of the respondents disagree that lack of knowledge prevents them from using social media for political activities. At the same time, 33.3% of them strongly disagree that lack of knowledge prevents them from using social media for political activities. Nevertheless, 12.5% and 5.7% strongly agree and agree respectively that lack of knowledge prevents them from using social media for political activities while 3.9% of the total respondents neither agree nor disagree that lack of knowledge prevents them from using social media for political activities.

According to the study (as depicted in table 17) 44.8% of the respondents disagree that lack of skills inhibits them from using social media for political activities. To add up, 32.6% of them strongly disagree that lack of skills prevents them from using social media for political activities. Nonetheless, 11.8% and 6.5% strongly agree and agree respectively that lack of skills is the reason why they do not use social media for political activities. Also, 4.3% of the

respondents neither agree nor disagree that lack of skills is the reason why they do not use social media for political activities.

Table 17. Lack of skills prevents me from using social media for political activities.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	33	11.8
Agree	18	6.5
Neither agree nor disagree	12	4.3
Disagree	125	44.8
Strongly disagree	91	32.6
Total	279	100.0

The respondents were asked whether they think using social media for political activities was expensive as compared to the traditional means of taking part in political activities. Of all the 279 respondents, 81.0% of them answered no whiles 19.0 answered yes.

Table 18. Social media use for politics is expensive.

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	53	19.0
No	226	81.0
Total	279	100.0

Also, the respondents were asked whether in their experience social media was conducive for political discussions. 79.2% of them said yes whiles 20.8% said no as shown in table 19.

Table 19. Social media platform is a conducive environment for political discussions.

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	221	79.2
No	58	20.8
Total	279	100.0

The goal for this section was to find out the factors that prevented citizens from using social media for political participation. Six variables namely lack of time, accessibility, knowledge and skills as well as the cost involve in its use and whether social media platforms are conducive for political discussions were used. According to Chatora (2012), Teorell (2006) and Bergström (2006) political participation on social media is made possible or impossible by the availability of some resources namely: physical capital, human capital and social capital. Political participation is quite demanding and resources such as time, knowledge and money prevent people from taking part in democratic activities such as politics. In order to ascertain the credibility of this claim, the researcher used the variables above to ascertain whether those challenges also prevented people from using social media for political activities.

With the variable time, the number of respondents who have the notion that social media use for politics does not require much time was higher than those who are of the view that social media usage for politics requires much time, therefore it can be concluded that most of the respondents think time is not a factor that prevents them from using social media for political activities. It can be concluded that using social media for political activities does not seem to take up people's time and people seem to have time for it as compared with other traditional political participation activities like attending rallies where those willing to engage in such activities must devote a great deal of their time or money for it. This findings support Chatora's (2012, p.4) claim that time is a material factor that prevent people from participating in politics and Wright and Street (2007, p.852) assertion that social media social media allow people to go about their normal duties whiles taking part in political discussions that interest them. Therefore, if people are able to use alternate means such as social media to participate in politics without devoting much of their time to it, then political participation activities will increase among citizens.

When it comes to accessibility, almost 70% of the respondents asserted that access to internet, mobile phones and computers were not challenges that prevented them from using social media for political participation. It can be seen that most of the respondents have access to internet which is key in using social media. The Internet World Stats report indicated

that Ghana had a penetration rate of 33.6% just in the first three months of 2019 which signifies the widespread of internet.

Again, with the variable lack of knowledge, about 77.7% of the respondents noted that knowledge, being it political knowledge or any other relevant knowledge needed for such purpose do not impede them from using social media to take part in politics. This is evident in the respondents' educational qualifications as illustrated in table 3. It can be seen that most of them have been educated and as such they possess some knowledge in one field or the other. Also, when the respondents were asked if lack of skills such as ICT skills prevented them from using social media for politics, about 77.4% of the respondents revealed that skills needed to use social media was not a challenge for them.

5 DISCUSSTIONS

5.1 Conclusions

This study was conducted with the aim of assessing social media and political participation. The purpose of this study was because social media remained underutilized among most of the populace in Ghana, and this study was to provide useful empirical findings which will enable the citizens to utilize social media for political participation.

From the findings, it is well-known that social media use for political activities is frequent among the respondents. Social media through its networking sites have been a major source of communication tools in most nation's political activities including Ghana. Its impact on citizen's participation in the political process cannot be overemphasized. Social media has the tendency to impact positively on governance and enhance the socio-economic development and wellbeing of the society. Social media enables citizens to monitor government officials and increases voters' knowledge.

The survey further revealed that social media usage in politics has gained roots among citizens in the Sunyani municipality. Prominent among these factors that encouraged or influenced citizens to participate in politics through social media was its cost effectiveness compared with alternate means like the mass media (buying of newspapers or calling radio stations phone in programs in other to contribute to discussions). As noted by Karpf (2009, p.67) and Wright and Street (2007, p.852) and Chatora (2011, p.4), the less expenses associated with social media usage encourage people to utilize it for political participation activities and social media is an important tool for deliberation and mobilizing people for political activities (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011, p.1208).

Again, social media usage for political activities was noted to require less amount of time, and it enables the organization of most political activities in no time at all. Social media among

other things enable real time deliberations on matters of interest between citizens who are able to take actions in no time (Wright and Street, p.850 - 852). In addition to the factors, accessibility was found out to be another factor that encouraged most of the respondents to engage in politics on social media. Again, social media improves government responsiveness by giving a voice to the vulnerable, as noted by Wright and Street (2007, p.851) in what they termed as “deliberation and hearing”. There is a robust link between social media and government responsiveness, especially to citizens, who have numerical strength in a democracy but are often ignored by politicians. Social media gives voice to the vulnerable and creates informed citizens who through lawful and unlawful political activities influence the actions of political representatives (Lam, 2003, p.491).

The study concludes that social media plays a very important role in enhancing citizen’s political participation. The way and manner social media is being utilized shows the potential of an online sphere that enables and promotes different forms of political activities. Social media as an interactive platform promotes conversational democracy which gives citizens the chance to engage with each other and their political representatives.

5.2 Discussions

The study was conducted based on the deliberative theory of democracy proposed by some theorist like John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas (Cunningham, 2002, p.163). The main aim of the study was to ascertain why people use or do not use social media for political participation. The theory of deliberative democracy is supported in various literature including Cunningham (2002); Chambers (2003) and Wright and Street (2007) as a way of enabling citizens’ participation in various democratic activities.

Online discussion platforms like social media have the tendency of promoting deliberative democracy because of its potential in aiding wide scale interactions among people on various political issues. Considering deliberations and social media, it is evident that opportunities

exist for citizens to participate in political activities in a more cost effective and less time consuming manner.

5.3 Suggestions

The National Commission for Civic Education, Institute for Economic Affairs, Centre for Democratic Development and various major stakeholders in the Ghanaian Political System should embark on extensive educational programmes for citizens and politicians on the effective and efficient usage of social media for political purposes since social media have the prospects for making citizens politically active.

The National Communications Authority (NCA) should properly check the telecommunication companies to ensure they give quality, cost effective and maximum network satisfaction to their clients. This will enable citizens to effectively and efficiently participate in politics through this innovative communication tool.

5.4 Recommendation for further studies

This study focused on the issue of social media and political participation by looking at the factors that make it possible or impossible for citizens to use social media for politics. The study was limited to the residents of Sunyani Municipal whose age ranged from 18 – 43. Going forward, it will be better if a broad area could be studied for such purpose. Also, the study only focus on the citizens social media use for politics ignoring the politicians who are all equally important when it comes to social media and politics. Furthermore, interaction between the researcher and the respondents is important in unearthing many factors. The researcher suggests future research should include interviews.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

For questionnaire please visit the link below:

<https://forms.gle/4VhNcxoDimiatZk7>